



United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
Washington, DC 20240

H32(2257)

FEB 11 2015

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Chairman
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman:

Pursuant to Public Law 110-229, I am pleased to transmit the *Rivers of Steel National Heritage Area Evaluation Findings* (Evaluation). The National Park Service (NPS) engaged the consultant group Westat as the evaluator to independently assess the progress, analyze the investments, and identify the critical components for sustainability of the National Heritage Area. Based on the findings of the Evaluation, as required by Section 462(c) of Public Law 110-229, the NPS recommends a future role with Rivers of Steel National Heritage Area (RSNHA). NPS will work with the RSNHA to implement business, fundraising, and financial resource development plans, and form networks of operational and financial partnerships to further long-term sustainability of RSNHA operations.

RSNHA, along the Allegheny, Monongahela, and Ohio Rivers in Pennsylvania, was the center of America's iron and steel industries. As the industry declined, so did the economy. The coordinating entity, Rivers of Steel Heritage Corporation (RSHC), works to revitalize the economic and cultural spirit of the area through heritage tourism, educational and community development, and trails by partnering with governments, groups, schools, businesses, and residents.

The evaluation determined that RSNHA addressed its legislated purposes and management goals through the Federal resources provided and matching funds. The Rivers of Steel Management Action Plan, approved in 2000, focuses on resource conservation, education and interpretation, economic and community revitalization, recreation/river trails and landings, and conservation of cultural traditions.

From 1996 and 2011, RSHC received \$13,687,188 in NPS Heritage Partnership Program funding, which was matched with \$19,908,281 from non-Federal sources, exceeding the requirement for matching contributions. The RSHC has a variety of funding sources, including Pennsylvania State agencies, the Pennsylvania Heritage Park Program, donations, other Federal sources such as the Federal Highway Administration, the Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, and the National Endowment for

the Arts. The RSNHA's NPS assistance funds remain below the authorized amount of \$15 million.

The RSHC implements conservation by providing grants and assistance to organizations, preserving and archiving artifacts, and restoring historic properties. Over 60 conservation projects were undertaken by RSHC, using 29 percent of their NPS Heritage Partnership Program funding, on sites such as the Homestead Historic District, location of the Homestead Strike of 1892, one of America's most important labor battles. The Bost Building, which was the Union Headquarters, was acquired by RSHC in 1998 and opened in 2002 as the Steel Industry Heritage Interpretive and Visitor Center. RSHC raised over \$4.5 million for the building's acquisition, stabilization, and rehabilitation. Additionally, over \$2 million dollars were raised for the planning, stabilization, and restoration of the Carrie Furnace, Pump House, and Water Tower. Such projects required collaboration with local, State and Federal partners including the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

The RSHC supported over 65 education and interpretation projects such as trainings, programs, signage, tours, and films. Staff provided assistance to partners, including the development of exhibits, publications, archiving, and restoration. They emphasized traditions of the immigrant communities as part of the industrial history by providing grants and assistance for preservation of buildings, churches, art, and artifacts. The Bost Building archive facility conserves folk art and oral histories.

RSHC created a system of trails and sites using over \$8 million, or 44 percent of their NPS Heritage Partnership funds, which provide recreational and health benefits. Funds spent for recreation, river trails and landings contributed to business development, supported preservation, and increased visitation and revitalization. They leveraged over \$2 million from the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century to construct the 22-mile Three Rivers Heritage Trail. RSHC oversaw development of the 9-mile Steel Valley Trail, part of Great Allegheny Passage. RSHC acquired the Rankin Hot Metal Bridge for Allegheny County to continue the Steel Heritage Trail. The County then obtained \$10 million in Department of Transportation funds to provide access. In 2000, over \$2 million was received from the Federal Highway Administration for the Mid-Mon River Landings.

RSHC supports the mission of the NPS through preservation of historic sites and adding properties to the National Register. RSHC has worked with NPS programs including Save America's Treasures, the National Register of Historic Places, the National Historic Landmarks Program, the Historic American Buildings Survey/ Historic American Engineering Record, and Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance.

The RSNHA is fulfilling its legislative mandate. With appropriate authorization, a range of options exist for NPS involvement in supporting the area including: providing financial and technical assistance, coordinating training, providing operational guidance and guidance on long-term sustainability planning, partnering with National Parks for events and programming, consulting on preservation and conservation, and consulting on plans and projects.

An identical letter is being sent to the Honorable Maria Cantwell, Ranking Minority Member, Committee on Energy and Natural Resources; the Honorable Rob Bishop, Chairman, Committee on Natural Resources, United States House of Representatives; and the Honorable Raul Grijalva, Ranking Minority Member, Committee on Natural Resources, United States House of Representatives.

Sincerely,

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Michael Bean
Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary
for Fish and Wildlife and Parks

Enclosures

cc: The Honorable Patrick Toomey
The Honorable Robert Casey Jr.
The Honorable Michael Doyle
The Honorable Mike Kelly
The Honorable Tim Murphy
The Honorable Keith Rothfus
The Honorable Bill Shuster
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The Honorable Ken Calvert
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Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
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Washington, D.C. 20510

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Michael Bean
Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary
for Fish and Wildlife and Parks

Enclosures

cc: The Honorable Patrick Toomey
The Honorable Robert Casey Jr.
The Honorable Michael Doyle
The Honorable Mike Kelly
The Honorable Tim Murphy
The Honorable Keith Rothfus
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Committee on Natural Resources
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for Fish and Wildlife and Parks

Enclosures

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